

ROSTICCIANA – TUSCAN STYLE PORK RIBS WITH BALSAMIC GLAZE

Every time I make this dish I am transported back to those first autumn days at the trattoria in Cercina outside of Florence. What a surprise to learn that Tuscans love barbecued ribs! It was really easy to just scope up the smoldering embers from the kitchen's huge wood burning stove and shovel them under the adjacent grill. There we would simply use salt and pepper to flavor them with the addition of a faint essence of rosemary imparted by the make-shift brush made of fresh sprigs dipped in olive oil. Those pork ribs were insanely flavorful albeit sometimes a little tough. We've experimented quite a bit and have come up with a recipe that renders the ribs moist and crisp from the last minute sear on the grill with a brushing of balsamic glaze. "O mamma mia, quant'e buona!"

Buon Appetito, Christianne

Yields: 3 racks of pork ribs

INGREDIENTS:

6 pounds of pork spareribs
3 large sprigs fresh rosemary
Small bunch fresh thyme
Small bunch fresh sage
10 cloves garlic, chopped
3 tablespoons juniper berries
1 teaspoon cloves
1 teaspoon ground anise seed
2 teaspoons ground fennel seeds
2 tablespoons salt
1 tablespoon pepper
3 cups balsamic vinegar
1 tablespoon honey

DIRECTIONS:

1. Place juniper berries in a plastic bag and smash them with a meat cleaver.
2. Coarsely chop the fresh herbs – rosemary, sage & thyme.
3. Combine all the spices, fresh herbs, garlic, salt & pepper in a food processor and grind to a rather fine consistency.
4. Place the ribs on a small sheet pan and rub with olive oil. Then sprinkle with the herb/spice mixture and massage into the meat. Let stand at room temperature for 2 hours or refrigerate overnight loosely covered with aluminum foil. Caution – Do not use plastic wrap or the ribs will "sweat" and become wet.
5. Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Arrange the ribs on a rack on a large, rimmed baking sheet or roasting pan, meaty side up. Roast for 2 ½ hours or until tender. Remove from oven.
6. In the meantime place 3 cups commercial grade balsamic vinegar & the honey in a small saucepan and reduce by half to more or less 1 ½ cups.
7. Brush the ribs with the balsamic glaze and place on a hot grill or under the broiler for a few minutes, just until a dark crust forms. Let stand a few minutes, then cut between ribs and serve.